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The Soviet KGB and the press

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Voice of America staffer says the Soviet KGB may have hundreds of recruited agents who plant articles in the world's free press

By M.L. Stein

The Soviet KGB may have hundreds of recruited agents among foreign journalists, including some in the U.S., "ready at any time to place prepared stories in their national media," a Voice of America staff member told a California conference recently.

Any Soviet official, scholar or journalist abroad may plant propaganda, even if he is not a KGB member, said Lisa Jameson, senior editorial writer for VOA. "This is especially true in the United States, where the Soviets seem to have a fertile field for implantation."

Jameson, who emphasized that her views are not necessarily those of VOA or the United States Information Agency, delivered her remarks at a Hoover Institution conference on Public Diplomacy on the Stanford University campus Oct. 3-4.

She disclosed that much of her information on the planting of material by Soviet agents emerged in her interviews with two Russian defectors, who had posed as journalists while working for the KGB.

She identified them as Stanislav Levchenko, a "disinformation specialist," who defected in 1979 while serving undercover as a Nvoya Vremya (*New Times*) correspondent in Tokyo, and Ilya Dzhirkvelov, who at one time was chief editor of TASS' final editing desk. But, according to Jameson, he worked under journalistic cover in both the First and Second Chief Directorates of the KGB.

Jameson said that, according to Dzhirkvelov, the majority of Soviet media placements are not achieved through officially recruited or co-opted sources.

"Dzhirkvelov, himself as a KGB operative posing as a journalist, simply offered information to Western counterparts, making no secret of the fact that he knew it would be reported," Jameson explained.

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"Often, Jameson stated, this was enough to pass along what the KGB referred to as 'rumors' that would whet the appetites of foreign journal-

ists. Occasionally, foreign contacts would accept payment — not agreeing to any long-standing relationship but simply a one-time deal."

The VOA writer quoted Dzhirkvelov as remarking: "Foreign journalists seemed to have few ideological convictions. They seemed more interested in money."

In a telephone interview with *E&P* from Washington, D.C., Jameson was asked if the KGB had used any American journalists or media to plant propaganda or disinformation.

"I can't give you hard evidence. I don't know," she replied. "The KGB has many, many sources in the foreign press — cooperating contacts."

Jameson said neither of her defector informants had worked in the United States, but "both of them assumed there are people within the media in the United States and other countries who can be counted on to place articles in the press."

The VOA staffer added that, in her personal opinion, "there would tend to be fewer (Soviet media contacts) in the United States."

In the interview, Jameson cited a specific case in which the KGB planted a smear against an individual in a "major German periodical" after learning that the editor of the magazine had a "pathological hatred" against that person.

The Soviets, she said, passed up the smear through a kind of "daisy chain" of people to the editor, who did not bother to check the source of the material.

In her Stanford speech, Jameson claimed that "well-intentioned" American journalists cite TASS dispatches, Moscow press conferences, "or even articles in Soviet journals for stories they file as objective news reports."

She added that a "community of tv, radio and newspaper personalities has produced a mediocracy," which

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"exerts a powerful influence on public opinion, and thereby on the policies of the U.S. government."

The Soviets, she said, "are well aware of the seminal role of the American media and during the past five years they have exploited their accessibility to the hilt."

Jameson also asserted that the Soviet internal media have adopted a new policy of quoting the western press to support their propaganda efforts.

"In decades past," she said, "soviet internal media seldom quoted the non-socialist foreign press. Today, this is commonplace. *Pravda* regularly cites Western newspapers, especially prominent U.S. dailies such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* when their negative commentary on American actions or socio-economic conditions serve to buttress positions taken by the USSR, or when they have quoted critics of American policy."

An example, she went on, was when *Pravda* cited a *Washington Post* story as confirmation of the Soviet contention that Korean Airlines Flight 007 was on a spy mission when it was shot down by the Russians.

"The *Post* article was quoted out of context, and, of course, *Pravda* did

not bother to include material from Western periodicals that refuted Soviet claims," Jameson remarked.

Still, she pointed out, such tactics serve Soviet propaganda well since the Soviet reader "is often sojaded by a lifetime of propaganda that he may tend to believe the opposite of what he is told in official organs. . . . Skillful use of material from the Western press, even distorted, out-of-context or one-sided, can provide a certain patina of credibility to otherwise dismissible Soviet boilerplate."

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Another conference speaker, Michael A. Ledeen, a senior fellow at Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, contended that both politicians and the press contribute to alleged U.S. naivete about Soviet ideological warfare.

"Our politicians," he said, "are generally on-the-job learners, or if

they are professionals, they have every reason to be cautious rather than aggressive. Those who don't know how to do it, and those who know how to do it, can't afford to be aggressive — and that is a tough problem."

Ledeen, a White House national security advisor, former Rome correspondent for *New Republic* and a contributor to the *Los Angeles Times* and other publications, claimed "The American public cannot conceivably get a realistic view of the world by reading the American press or looking at tv. It's as simple as that."

"To get a 'real view' of the world," he said, Americans must go "partially outside. They have to read the *London Economist*, they have to spend hours watching something like Cable News Network — something outside the normal fare."